

STAND TALL

FOR PTS



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Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
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Submission: The mental health of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel who have returned from combat, peacekeeping or other deployment.

I am a Vietnam Veteran and the founder of Stand Tall For PTS. I am providing a short submission to this inquiry outlining my national work and the international forum on PTS (to be held in Brisbane, September 2015), a two-day event that will canvass all aspects of mental ill-health and post-traumatic stress among returned service personnel and others.

I also request an opportunity to appear before the Committee as the founder of the Stand Tall For PTS campaign to elaborate on the work of my organisation in post-traumatic stress, especially among ADF personnel.

Background

In 1967/68, I served in Vietnam, with 2RAR, as a National Serviceman. Returning from my tour of duty, from 1970 to 1975, I enjoyed a career in first class cricket as a fast bowler with Queensland. More significantly, I was selected to play two Test Matches under the captaincy of Ian Chappell.

Forty years after coming home from Vietnam I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress. The persistent and inescapable dark episodes in my life and subsequent marriage breakdown, started to make sense.

In 2007 I was invited into the Defence Cricket fold. It was discovered subsequently that I am the only Vietnam Veteran to play Test Cricket. In fact, it emerged that I am the only person in the world, since 1945, to have fought in a theatre of war and play Test Cricket.

After my own PTS diagnosis, I suspected that there were probably thousands more Vietnam Veterans who remained undiagnosed and were not receiving any help as their lives inexplicably crumbled around them.

Through my Test cricket and former Defence contacts, and with 40 years' experience in advertising, I decided to help other service people experiencing post-traumatic stress. Later I expanded this to include anyone who had been affected by PTS in any walk of life. What

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started as a mission to help Vietnam Veterans has grown immensely, now that I fully understand the size and scope of this problem.

The PTS Foundation Limited was incorporated and the necessary ATO charity concessions were officially registered with the statutory bodies and our advertising, marketing and fund-raising programme entitled “Stand Tall for PTS” was created.

Stand Tall For PTSD

Stand Tall For PTS has a Mission Statement that encapsulates the foundation’s purpose:

- To make every person in Australia aware of PTS.
- To dispel misconceptions about PTS and break down stigma.
- To help increase professional support channels.
- To lobby governments to properly recognise PTS and to supply adequate funds for meaningful research.
- To nurture reciprocal alignments with other mental health bodies.
- To organize a national forum and help form a peak body.
- To help NGOs with funding.
- To help create a national network of drop in centres and encourage corporate Australia to help rehabilitate, retrain and hire young veterans and others with PTS.

Support for Stand Tall for PTS

The Patron of Stand Tall For PTS is Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston, AC, AFC (ret’d).

We have strong support from Rear Admiral Ken Doolan (ret’d), National President of the RSL, Lt. General Peter Leahy (ret’d), former Chief of the Army, former Governor of Queensland, Major General Peter Arnison (ret’d), and many Members of Parliament.

More recently I have gained the support of the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott and the Chief of the Defence Forces, Air Chief Marshal, Mark Binskin.

Then there are the groups and associations which include various sub branches of the RSL, Picking up the Peaces, Anglicare, Catholic Care, the RAR Association, the Mental Health Australia, Cricket Australia, the Australian Cricketers Association, the Vietnam Veterans Association, Cricket Queensland, the NRL, Former Origin Greats, Connetica, the Queensland Police Service, the Australian Federal Police, Defence Cricket, the Sunshine Coast Council, Movember.

The individuals who support us include many of Australia’s most renowned sportsmen and prominent figures: Ian Chappell, Greg Chappell, Bill Lawry, Allan Border, David Colley, Shane Lee, Brett Lee, Adam Gilchrist, Darren Lehmann, Ian Healy, Stuart Law, Phil Carlson,

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Kerry O’Keeffe, Jim Maxwell, Andrew Slack, Michael Lynagh, Wally Lewis, Gene Miles, John Grant, Jason Dunstall, George Gregan, John Mendoza, Stephen Atkinson, John Schumann, Peter Cummiskey.

Stand Tall’s work in post-traumatic stress

Stand Tall works in four main areas:

- 1. Raising awareness of PTS.** We have a website (standtall4pts.org) that was established to make as many people as possible, aware of Post Traumatic Stress and to recognise the symptoms. It complements a national awareness campaign – Stand Tall for PTS – which has been established to help those with the condition, their family members and their friends to recognise the symptoms and to seek more knowledge and professional help.
- 2. De-stigmatising PTS.** The stigma associated with PTS exacerbates the problems. It stands in the way of addressing the problem and it can be the cause of the social dysfunction for those with PTS.
- 3. Providing support to those affected by PTS.** Our role is to provide people with PTS with some simple, straightforward answers; to open their minds to acceptance of their condition; to guide them towards professional help, and to give them some hope of permanent respite from the seemingly relentless symptoms that they suffer. Our goal as a foundation is to raise complete national awareness of PTS and eventually raise funds for research and treatment of those suffering PTS. The tragic extreme of PTS is when a sufferer becomes depressed and suicide is contemplated. Eventually, our goal is to help establish a national network of sponsored, professionally operated respite (“drop-in”) centres for people with PTS. Note that Stand Tall For PTS is not qualified to make recommendations about treatment of PTSD, just to help people recognise the symptoms in themselves, family members or friends. It is a conduit to recognised, authoritative websites and professionals who can help in the longer term.
- 4. Research.** Post Traumatic Stress is close to the single biggest health problems in Australia. PTS is one of the least understood health conditions by the general public and even by the medical fraternity. Our aim is to increase funding for research and treatment.

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International PTS Forum

I would appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss the first ever PTS Forum 2015, being held 11-12 September at the Brisbane International Convention centre; which Stand Tall For PTS initiated and is managing.

This international forum is the first of its kind and marks a landmark in PTS awareness in Australia. The delegates attending this forum will be drawn from Psychiatrists, Psychologists, GPs, Researchers, University personnel, Defence personnel, Veterans Affairs personnel, First Responders personnel, NGOs, Lifeline, Beyond Blue, Soldier On, Mates for Mates, Trojans Trek, Young Diggers, Veterans' Associations, RSL personnel, Triage personnel, Surgeons and Hospitals.

Please look at the website www.ptsd15.org

If the Committee would like to find out more information, the PTSD Forum 2015 Secretariat (Carillon Conference Management Pty Ltd) would be pleased to assist you with any forum enquiries:

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Regards

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